

3 - Establishing a Foundation of Faith

The people of Wichert had roots in the soil; however, the roots they established in their Christian faith were fully as deep and strong. From the earliest days, devotion to serving God became the heart of life in the community.



The first families who settled in the area had immigrated to America from the Netherlands where they had worshipped in Dutch Reformed Churches. They conscientiously adhered to Calvinist theological doctrines and forms of practice set forth by John Calvin, a leader of the Protestant Reformation. They continued to do so when they settled in Roseland and South Holland in suburban Chicago and then in Koster.

In 1891, approximately a dozen families began holding unorganized Sunday worship services in their homes in Koster.

In 1893, Arthur Van Vlissingan donated two acres of land on which the growing congregation constructed the Reformed Church of Koster where they worshipped from 1895 through 1898. The barn-like structure was divided into two sections. The farmers hitched their horses in one section and worshiped in the other section. At times, the noise made by the horses was so loud it distracted the worshippers.

In those days, the men sat on one side of the church and the women on the other side. Some of those early Dutchmen could be quite stubborn. When they had disputes, they



sat with their backs to one another so they wouldn't have to look at the people with whom they were angry. They believed in exercising firm authority and when they felt it was necessary to *discipline* their wives, they struck the ladies on the back of their legs with buggy whips.

An early schoolhouse (left) was sold in 1893 to the Christian Reformed Church, a

sister denomination. The building was used as a place of worship until the two congregations were united as the Reformed Church of Koster.

In 1902, a more conventional church and parsonage (right) were built about five miles from the original church. The two buildings were erected by members who volunteered their labor. In June 1912, the name of the Reformed Church of Koster was changed to the Reformed Church of Wichert.



Since most of the congregants were recent immigrants who were not yet conversant in the English language, worship services were conducted in the Dutch language. The services took place on Sunday mornings and Sunday afternoons, with Sunday School following afternoon services. The pastor, or *domine* in the Dutch language, taught catechism classes separately for boys and girls while the domine's wife sponsored the young girls' group and served as president of the women's societies.



*A Sunday School class held at the home of Teunis Romein in 1917.
(Left) Peter Romein, one of the builders of the home;
(Right) Josephine Romein, class teacher.*

Deacons selected by the congregation passed a bag called the *penny snatcher* on the end of a long stick to collect the offering. Most of the collection came in the form of pennies and other small change. Everyone used the same cup when they celebrated communion. The janitor was responsible for preparing the communion elements, so his wife baked bread and cut it into cubes.

In the early 1920's, congregants signed the following petition: *We, the undersigned communicant members of the Reformed Church of Wichert, believing that the welfare of the church, as well as the future usefulness and spiritual life of our young people, depends on a greater use of the American language in our services, hereby respectfully petition the consistory [elders and deacons selected by the congregation] to take such means as it may think best to find out the wish of the congregation so as to conduct the*

services every other Sunday afternoon in the American Language. In 1923, the consistory voted to have English used in the afternoon worship service.

As time passed, services were held twice on Sunday in English, in the morning and in the evening. Sunday School classes for everyone older than three years of age were held following the morning service. Elders passed trays of cups filled with the communion elements to all members of the church.

In 1930, a larger sanctuary and parsonage were constructed at a cost of \$28,000 (below, left). Since this was during the Great Depression, members of the church donated labor and many people sacrificed a great deal to provide for the project.



Sanctuary and parsonage constructed in 1930



Photos above and below by Harry Romein

The congregation worshipped in this church until the late 1950's when the building fell into disrepair and space became inadequate to meet the needs of the growing community. In 1961, members voted to construct a new sanctuary on the Wichert Road. When the new church was completed, a congregant who had purchased the old building converted it into a warehouse to store gladiolus bulbs. Sadly, the structure was destroyed a few years later when it was struck by lightning and burned to the ground.



The cornerstone-laying ceremony for the new church was held July 7, 1962, and the dedication service was conducted June 11, 1963. In addition, a site was secured across the Wichert Road from the church where a parsonage was built in 1965. A spire was added to the church later, in 1976.



The pipe organ and beautiful stained glass memorial windows were removed from the former church and installed in the new building. A window memorializing Mr. and Mrs. Teunis Romein (below, left) is located in the church's Fellowship Hall (below, right).

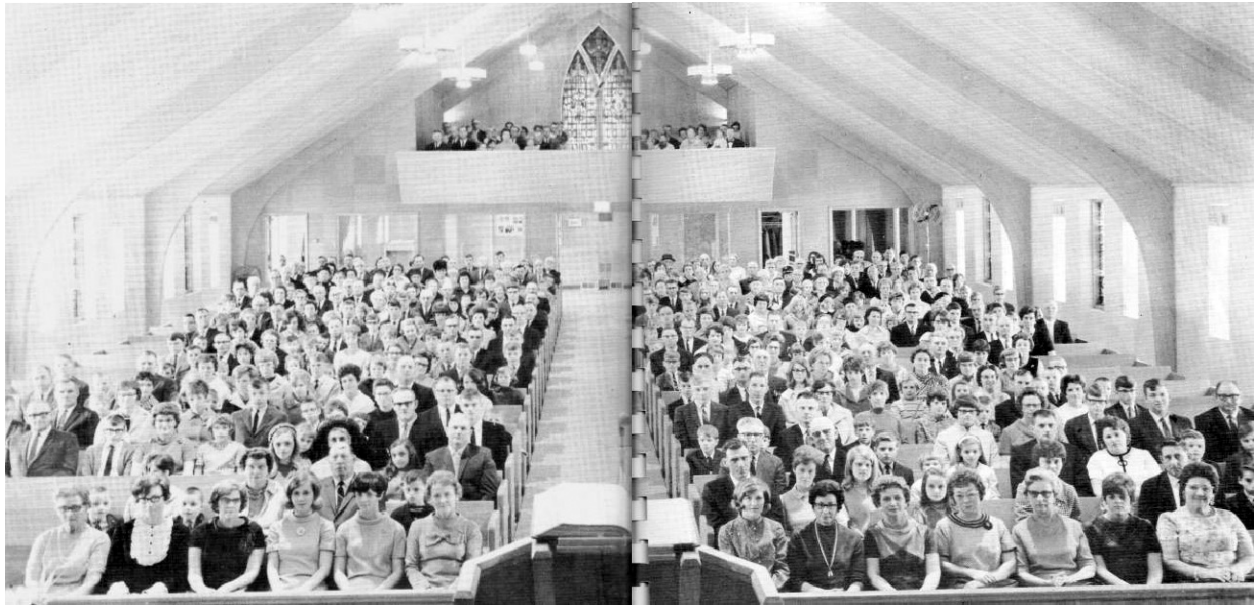


Photo Courtesy Paul Romein



<https://frcwichert.yolasite.com/photos.php>

Today, there are fewer people living in Wichert who are of Dutch descent or who are interested in worshipping in a Reformed Church. Attendance at the church's Sunday service has decreased, as evidenced by the photos on the following page.



The First Reformed Church of Wichert in 1968

From the "Seventy-fifth Anniversary - First Reformed Church of Wichert" commemorative booklet (1968)



The First Reformed Church of Wichert Today

From the church's website: [First Reformed Church of Wichert \(frcwichert.yolasite.com\)](http://frcwichert.yolasite.com)

The First Reformed Church of Wichert continues to this day to do the Lord's work with the help of all its members. The congregation steadfastly adheres to the creed and doctrines that have guided them for decades. With praise and gratitude to God, the history of the First Reformed Church of Wichert is still being written.